

**The Commission for Historical and Architectural
Preservation - Staff Report
November 18, 2008**



**Landmark and Special List
Designation Report
Grace Turnbull House
223 Chancery Road,
Baltimore, MD**

Background Information:

Location: 223 Chancery Road

Block and Lot: 3726 024

Neighborhood: Guilford Neighborhood

City Council District: District 14, Mary Pat Clarke

Zoning: R-1



The Grace Turnbull House is currently owned by PNC Bank who as Trustee of the Grace Turnbull estate is obligated to auction the property on behalf of the Maryland Historical Society. When Grace Turnbull died, she left the house and all its contents to the Maryland Historical Society. This occurred in 1976. In the summer of 2008, the Maryland Historical Society relinquished all rights and responsibilities to the property. PNC Bank has auctioned off the contents of the house and is now proceeding to sell the property.

City Councilwoman Mary Pat Clarke and the Friends of Grace Turnbull have requested that the Grace Turnbull property be placed on the Baltimore City Landmark and Special lists.

Staff Recommendation: Approval

The Grace Turnbull House meets Baltimore City *Landmark Standards for Designation* number two as the home of prominent world-renown artist, scholar, and author Grace H. Turnbull. In 1927 Bayard Turnbull, brother of Grace, designed the house for Grace where she lived until her death in 1976.

Brief Description:

The property comprises the main house, landscaped garden area, and the studio. The house is a composite primarily of Spanish Mission Revival and Arts and Crafts architectural details. The house is a two-story stucco house with a hipped roof. It is set back from the street with the main entrance set to the side. In the rear, the studio resembles a small Spanish parish church topped with a bell tower. At the corners of the house Grace Turnbull has carved four long, thin sculptures that were carved in place. These tree-trunk carvings, as Turnbull called them, illustrate *St. Francis Preaching to the Birds*, *Christ Touching a Dead Soul to Life*, *Madonna and Child*, and *Flight into Egypt*. She also sculpted several beam-ends with a leaf and acorn motif, and inscribed on a lintel *Mane nobiscum quoniam advesperascit et inclininata est jam dies* (Luke 24.29, *Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent*). On the studio, Turnbull carved a relief of a woman's head. These carvings are integral to the house and have become prominent architectural features. The garden was landscaped with other works of art: an Occidental Buddha, a Squirrel, Sleeping Swan, a Garden Bust and terminal statues of Satyr and Dryad. These landscape features have been removed.

Brief Summary:

Grace Turnbull was born in 1880 to a prominent Baltimore family. The family lived in Bolton Hill in the mansion that has become part of Beethoven Apartments (1500 Block of Park Avenue). The family also owned La-Paix, a summer home in Towson that became a temporary home for F. Scott Fitzgerald. Turnbull grew up surrounded by artists and intellectuals. Her father edited *The New Eclectic* and the *Southern* magazines, which published poets such as Sidney Lanier. As important, her mother became the president of the Women's Literary Club and a novelist. Grace would spend her childhood surrounded by literature and the arts.

She entered the Maryland Institute college of Art where she served as an assistant to Philadelphia artist, Thomas Anschutz. She also studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Arts. Here she became adept at portrait painting. In 1902, Turnbull went to Rome to study sculpture with Moses Ezekiel, and in 1913 she went to Brittany to paint. In 1914 she became a Red Cross searcher for the missing in World War One. At this point in her life, Grace was a committed religious pacifist.

After 1919 and several trips through the Caribbean and to the Grand Canyon, Grace focused on painting flowers and landscapes. In 1927 after settling in Baltimore, she asked her brother, Bayard to design a house. In 1929 she published *Tongues of Fire: A Bible of Sacred Scriptures of the Pagan World*. This book was the culmination of her deep interest in world religions and sacred writings. This book has been reprinted several times, most recently in 2001. Around 1934 she published *Essence of Plotinus*, a translation which some say introduced Plotinus to 20th century America. She penned other work: *Fruit of the Vine as Seen by Many Witnesses in all Times*, nonfiction (1950), *Chips From My Chisel*, An Autobiography (1953), *The Uncovered Well*, Fiction (1954), and *Paintings and Sculpture*, an Art Book (1959).

Grace Turnbull's art changed throughout her career. She first worked as a portrait painter using pastels, then oil. Prior to World War One, she studied sculpture in Italy and painting in Brittany. After World War one, she painted landscapes and flowers. After World War II she began making sculpture, leaving Baltimore with several important monuments and outdoor sculpture, including the Reese monument and the Naiad in Mount Vernon Place. By the time of her death, she was an international art figure, an artist and philosopher whose books are still in publication, and a humanitarian. She passed away in 1976 at the age of 96. Her artwork can be found in many museums including the Baltimore Museum of Art and the Metropolitan Museum in New York.



This feature sits above the studio door



Beam-ends carved by Grace Turnbull (2008)



Flight From Egypt (2008 and 1953)



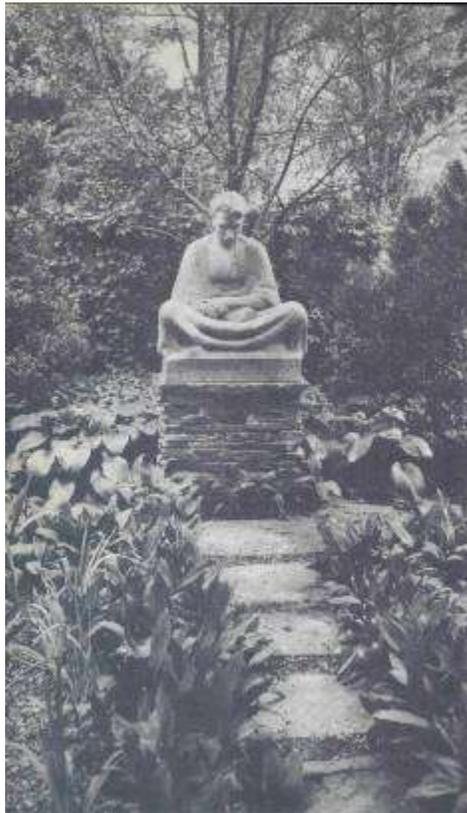
St. Francis Preaching to the Birds (1953 and 2008)



Madonna and Child (1953)



Studio (1953)

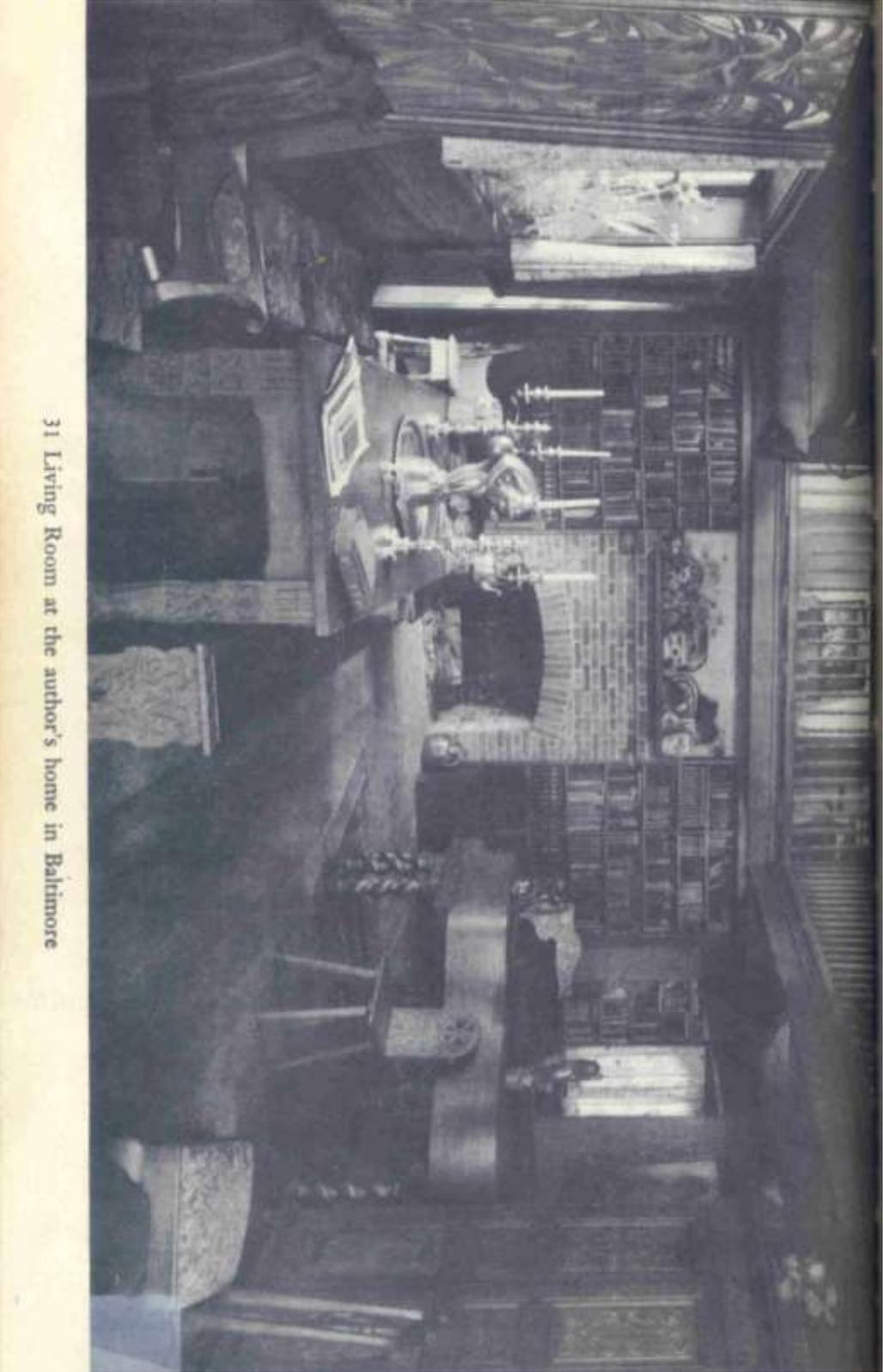


Occidental Buddha (1953)





Studio



31 Living Room at the author's home in Baltimore